

THE MASK SURVEY

November 16, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Members,

A “survey,” rather than a “vote,” is nonbinding, allowing the surveyors to interpret and deal with the results as they see fit. The coordinators’ mask survey polled members on whether masks should be mandatory or optional for shoppers, and for work-

ers.

But the coordinators multiplied two simple and logical categories—“shoppers” and “workers”—into four complex combinations, which produced these results:

51%: Masks are optional for all member workers and shoppers.

43%: Masks are required for member shoppers and members working inside the Coop.

4%: Masks are required for members working inside the Coop and optional for shoppers.

2%: Masks are optional for all member workers and required for shoppers.

Based on this combination of categories, they arrived at a majority (51%) for masks being optional for both shoppers and workers, which they assessed as “too close to consider changing the current policy at this time.” But by uncombining these four categories into the two logical questions, “Should masks be optional or mandatory for shoppers?” and the same question for “workers,” one sees that 55% of members voted “optional” for shoppers and 53% of members voted “optional” for workers, more substantial majorities, which is less easily characterized as “too close” to consider.

But let’s also consider the fundamental assumption underlying the “survey” itself, the assumption that such a policy is—quite naturally—for the coordinators to decide. But is it? Are the coordinators any more knowledgeable than members about COVID-19, or about the efficacy and absolute necessity of masks? Is this not a cooperative, run democratically? And so are the coordinators thus exceeding their authority in unilaterally continuing a mask mandate after the City has ended its own such mandate? Shouldn’t this be a decision for the General Meeting to make?

David Barouh

JOE HOLTZ'S SUSPENSION

November 16, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Editors,

I missed the issue of the *Gazette* in which Joe Holtz's suspension was reported.

I'm appalled at the severity of the punishment. I share shops and mass transit with un-masked people whose vaccination status and exposure to the virus I don't know. One COVID-exposed person wearing an N95 doesn't even register on my radar, especially since, as I hope we all know, mask-wearing people are protecting others more than they're protecting themselves.

As well, I might point out that we're all taking the vaccination and exposure status of our fellow shoppers on trust. A month's suspension without pay or the ability to shop is a Twitter-mob-worthy response to Mr. Holtz's infraction.

Sincerely,
Jolanta Benal

PAY JOE HOLTZ

November 16, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Editors,

I have been a member of the PSFC since the 1970s. I was dismayed to learn that General Manager Joe Holtz was punished with a month's suspension without pay because he came to work, wearing an N95 mask, while awaiting a PCR test result, a test result that came back positive. What he did was a mistake. The severity of the punishment the Personnel Committee meted out was also a mistake.

Joe, a co-founder of the PSFC, has served and continues to serve the Coop very well. A reprimand is deserved. But taking away a month's pay from a highly effective manager is too much.

I recommend that he be refunded his month's pay. A reprimand? YES. Losing a month's pay? NO.

Sincerely,
Irvin Schonfeld

MASK POLICY VOTING

November 16, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Editors,

I was disturbed to read the email of October 21, 2022, on the voting results for the mask policy. More than 4,600 members took time to vote on the issue, and there was an 8-point margin between masks optional for all (51%) and masks required for all (43%). The voting presented the idea of a democratic decision-making process of majority rules by voting. We were only then to learn that the General Coordinators made

a wholesale decision that the 8- point spread was too close (based on what?) and decided internally to keep the masks.

If a small minority can decide the outcome in spite of the voting, and regardless of the actual counts, I wonder where that leaves us. Better not to ask for a vote at all.

Olivia Rokotuiveikau (Stinson)

MEMBER SHOPPING

November 16, 2022

Hello,

The recent mask survey made me think of another aspect of the pandemic aftermath. What I am referring to are the “carrots,” or the limit on the number of members that are allowed to shop in the Coop at any given time. I am not certain whether there have been discussions around this topic. I am very much hoping that this rule will remain implemented indefinitely.

My husband and I both have full time jobs, and so our only opportunity to do a big shop is on the weekends. Although we would typically shop during less popular hours, like Friday or Saturday night, once in a while we would have to do our weekly shopping on Saturday or Sunday midday. It was dreadful, and stressful, as many members may recall. The amount of people, shopping carts, workers and stocking carts allowed not an inch of breathing room. There was nowhere to stand, no way to turn, not to mention pass someone, or reach for a food item. The checkout line went all the way down the freezer aisle, and between the members in line and the stockers it was virtually impossible to get something out of the freezer.

I used to feel like I was in an episode of “Survivor” trying to hunt for food for my family among many obstacles and competitors. Shopping on the weekend required skills like acrobatics, war tactics and deep sociology. The experience was truly gruesome. My quality of life drastically improved (despite COVID-19) when the Coop occupancy started being regulated and controlled during the pandemic. I do not mind standing in line outside, in the heat, in the rain or in the midst of winter, knowing that inside awaits a humane shopping experience. During Covid the occupancy restriction was protecting our physical health, but I believe that it should remain in place for the sake of our mental health. I am hopeful that many members agree with this sentiment.

Sincerely,

Ula Bochinska